

Herman-Grima House
820 St. Louis Street
New Orleans
Orleans Parish
Louisiana

HABS No. LA-1122

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Washington Planning and Service Center
1730 North Lynn Street
Arlington, Virginia

HERMAN-GRIMA HOUSE

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Location: 820 St. Louis Street; this house is located in Square 70, Lot 8, within the French Quarter (Vieux Carre).

Present Owner: Christian Woman's Exchange.

Present Use: The structure presently is used by the Christian Woman's Exchange and professional women.

Statement of Significance: The Herman-Grima House is a fine example of a Federal period house plan of the northeastern United States adapted to function as a New Orleans' townhouse. Locally this house is identified with the name of the second owner, Felix Grima.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners: Most authorities and authors agree that this house was built by Samuel Herman, a wealthy commission merchant who purchased the site on May 19, 1823 (e.g. Stanley C. Arthur on p. 131 of his Old New Orleans states that the date and builder, although not definitely ascertained, was probably Samuel Herman, Sr. soon after the date on which he purchased the site). According to the Chain of Title secured from the Notarial Archives, City of New Orleans, the Christian Woman's Exchange acquired the property from the Louisiana Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (J.H. Douglas Notary Public, January 3, 1924), who had acquired it from Edgar Grima et al (A. W. Cooper, Notary Public, June 7, 1921). Various successions and transfers within the Grima family date back to a Sheriff's Sale in proceedings entitled "Citizens Bank of Louisiana vs. Felix Grima," in which an Edgar Grima acquired the property by Sheriff's Deed dated April 18, 1874 (C.O.B. 103, folio 298). The acquisition by Felix Grima appears to be dated either 1840 or 1844 (1840 according to p. 136 of New Orleans, Its Old Houses, Shops, and Public Buildings; 1844 according to p. 230 of the New Orleans City Guide and p. 131 of Old New Orleans).

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2. Date of erection: The published sources indicated in the bibliography give various dates between 1823 and 1831 as the date of erection. In the New Orleans Notarial Archives is a building contract registered with "Sm. Christy, 16 Feb. & 16 March 1831" which indicates that "Wm. Brand, builder" built a structure for Samuel Herman for \$15,205.00 (second contract for a three story back building for \$5,000.00).
3. Architect: Most of the published sources agree that this house was built by William Brand, the architect of the Orleans Bellroom (1816)
4. Original plans, construction, etc.: A postcard sold at the House by the Christian Woman's Exchange indicates that drawings of the house are available at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. An inquiry (1966) to the Museum, however, did not "reveal" any architect's or measured drawings in their collection.
5. Important old views: In recent years this has been one of the most illustrated and photographed buildings in the French Quarter; however, no old views have been located.

B. Historical Events:

The structure was originally built for the French commission merchant or banker, Samuel Herman, and remained his family's home until c. 1840.

The next owner was Felix Grima, an important figure in the civic affairs of New Orleans. During the Civil War, the building housed Federal troops.

c. Sources of Information:

Arthur, Stanley Clisby. Old New Orleans. New Orleans: Harman Sons, 1936.

Christian Woman's Exchange. "The Aristocrat of the Vieux carre." Mimeographed, undated brochure available to visitors at the house, probably c. 1960.

Curtis, N. C. New Orleans, Its Old Houses, Shops, and Public Buildings. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1933.

Grima House, Architectural Art and Its Allies, Vol. II, No. 9 (February, 1907) 17ff. (3 exterior and two interior views of the Grima House).

Notarial Acts (Notarial Archives, City of New Orleans)

Wilson, Samuel, Jr., FAIA. A Guide to Architecture of New Orleans. New York: Reinhold Publishing Corporation, 1959.

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Works Progress Administration (Federal Writers' Project). New Orleans' City Guide. (American Guide Series) Boston: Houghton, Mifflin Company, 1952.

Prepared by John C. Poppeliers, Editor
Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
September, 13, 1966

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The Herman-Grima House is generally regarded as one of the finest houses in the French Quarter. New Orleans has indicated that this building whose design is so reminiscent of Federal period architecture in the Northeast, was constructed of yellow brick from Philadelphia.
2. Condition of fabric: Good - well maintained.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: Five-bay front. Two-and-a-half stories.
2. Foundations: Not accessible.
3. Wall construction: Yellow brick.
4. Porches, stoops, bulkheads, etc.: Recessed entrance stoop with granite steps on front; glazed gallery of three bays on rear; wood balconies with wrought iron railing on second floor of both front and rear.
5. Chimneys: Five brick chimneys
6. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The main entrance door is a single wooden door (with six raised panels) flanked by glazed sidelights. The door and sidelights are framed with slender Ionic columns, with the

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architrave breaking back towards the door; above the architrave is an elliptical fanlight with a richly carved moulding. This opening is duplicated at the second floor balcony. In the rear on the courtyard the glazed gallery is composed of three elliptical arched openings springing from Doric columns; the doors in each opening are double, with six lights and two wooden panels each; the sidelight at these openings are glazed with four lights above a single wooden panel; there are fan lights in each opening. Leading to the balcony above there are three sets of double doors with transoms, elliptical openings above, and shutters.

- b. Windows and shutters: In general six-over-six-light double-hung wooden sash with wooden paneled shutters.

7. Roof:

- a. Shape, Gable; framing not ascertained.
- b. Cornice: Existing cornice is brick.
- c. Dormers: Three dormers in rear slope of gable roof; each has a gable roof and six-over-six-light double-hung wooden sash.

C. Description of Interior:

- 1. Floor plans: Sketch plan may be seen in Curtis, N. C., New Orleans, Its Old Houses, Shops, and Public Buildings.
- 2. Stairways: A double run right-hand stairway with winders leads up to second floor from entrance hall; brass newel post at landing.
- 3. Walls and ceiling: Smooth finished plaster.
- 4. Doors and doorways: In general six-recessed-paneled wooden doors with transoms over.
- 5. Decorative features and trim: Moulded wooden trim around openings; double parlors (now closed off with wooden paneled doors) separated by two fluted Corinthian columns (this opening also has an alabaster carved panel at the top).

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6. Lighting: Modern electric.
7. Heating: Gas space heaters

D. Site:

1. General setting: This structure which is located within the French Quarter is situated in a neighborhood of small residences and townhouses.
2. Enclosures: The side yard is enclosed with a brick wall.
3. Outbuildings: To the rear of the main house are a brick three-story garçonne with wooden balconies and an attached one-story brick kitchen wing; a one-story stable has been converted into a gift shop.
4. Landscaping: Ther Herman-Grima House has a patio courtyard famous in the French Quarter, with stone paving, raised flower beds, boxwood, magnolias and palm trees.

Prepared by Woodrow W. Wilkins
Architect
National Park Service
Summer, 1963